

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



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NEWSLETTER

Croome Overview *by Michael Forster-Smith*

2106 is set to be an especially significant year in Croome's development, marking both the 300th-anniversary of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's birth and the twentieth anniversary of the National Trust's acquisition of the parkland at Croome. We have planned a full programme of events to celebrate these key milestones, including a series of lectures on Capability Brown and his influence on Croome and exhibitions planned for Croome Court and the Temple Greenhouse.

With regard to our programme of project works, we are focusing on improving much of the functional infrastructure of Croome this year. We have allocated funding to increase our car-parking and sewage removal facilities, a consequence of growing visitor interest in our restoration work, and Croome's fascinating story.

Surveys and a specification for the repair of the eighteenth-century weir at the end of the Croome River are required as it is leaking significantly, just as it appears to have done in Brown's day! Significant funds have been secured towards restoring Croome's original carriage drives for use as a multipurpose route for visitors around the periphery of the park. We will encourage cyclists to use this four-mile stretch to explore Croome's wider parkland.

We have received over 197,000 visitors in the financial year just ended, an increase of over 20,000 on the previous 12-month period. This growth has been helped by a good deal of local and national press coverage in recent months, particularly with regard to our work to celebrate Capability Brown's tercentenary.



Croome, February 2016 (Nadja von Dahlen)

Further interest in Croome will no doubt be generated towards the end of this year as we plan for the return of the Coventry collection of chattels from Kelmarsh Hall.

Visitor numbers have remained strong even through the worst of the winter weather, thanks to the RAF Defford Museum providing interest for visitors under the cover of our main visitor centre. Over 50,000 visitors have been recorded in the museum since it opened, and feedback on the new 'Women of RAF Defford' exhibition has been very good. The opening of the former Ambulance Garage for the first time with an exhibition centred around the display of a Canberra jet's front section has also proved very popular with visitors.

Progress with negotiations for the National Trust to take on the operational stewardship of the Elgar Birthplace Museum, at Lower Broadheath, has been strong and we remain on course to take on a lease of this site in October of this year.



The Chinese Bridge at Croome, March 2016 (Kev Maslin)

www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

The link between Troutbeck and Capability Brown

by Alan Wills (Westmorland Gazette, 16 January 2016)

The transportation of some Troutbeck slate to Worcestershire for one of Capability Brown's architectural masterpieces was a routine struggle by 18th century standards, involving packhorses, a ship, smaller vessels, the press gang and probably horses and carts.

Croome Court, the home-to-be of Lord Coventry, was Brown's first commission as an architect in 1755. The 30 tons of best-quality blue slate from Troutbeck Park were to be used for the prestigious job of roofing the mansion. Cheaper Welsh slate would be used to roof the service buildings.

The Troutbeck Park quarries were owned by Ralph Day of London and Maidenhead. As Day's tenant farmer at Troutbeck Park and Hird House, John Harrison augmented his income by helping at the quarries and by transporting slate on packhorses to a small dock on the shore of Windermere at Ecclerigg.

After he had taken the slate to Ecclerigg it was loaded on to vessels and taken to the foot of the lake. Horses and carts were probably used for three miles and from there to a crane at Low Wood, Haverthwaite. There it was loaded on to lighters which carried it down to River Leven to the Leven Estuary.

Two of the lightermen were John Colton, who ferried 12 tons on 1 May and Elkanah Taylor who ferried 10 tons on 7 June. It was then loaded onto 'The Kendal Merchant', captained by John Turner and bound for Chepstow.



Troutbeck Park Farm (Anne Bowker)

Instead of unloading at Chepstow, Captain Turner sailed a further 20 miles up the River Severn to Newnham, prompting Day to complain that it would have been cheaper to have used lighters for the extra 20 miles.

Captain Turner had to explain that he gone overland from Chepstow to Bristol to arrange lighters only to discover that there was a shortage of crew members for them due to the press gang, which had even taken one of his own men. Details of the final leg of the slate's journey are unknown.

A second consignment, this time for 14 tons, was sent in 1757. When the builder submitted his bill for roofing Croome Court with 'best Westmorland slate' from 1755 to 1758, Capability Brown deducted £4 alleging that the builder had overcharged.

Henry Dachicour

by Mike Payne

Henry Dachicour was house steward to the 9th Earl of Coventry for over 30 years. He was born in 1837 in Walcot, a suburb of Bath. His father was a mason who died when Henry was only 4 years old. Henry's mother remarried and had a second family. Henry eventually went to live with his married elder sister and started his working life as an errand boy in Bath.

The first record of Henry's entry into the higher echelons of domestic service is in the 1861 Census when he was footman and valet to Lord Monson at his winter home in Lord Monson's main seat was Burton Hall, close to Lincoln. He also owned Gatton



Croome Court, Worcestershire, Seat of The Earl of Coventry (The Illustrated London Almanack 1895)

Park, near Reigate – another ‘Capability’ Brown parkland. His Lordship maintained a domestic staff of 11 so the regime would have provided a good training ground for the young Henry.

We next encounter Henry in Bloomsbury, London in 1867 when he is married to Martha Hannah Simpson. Martha originated from near Boston, Lincolnshire, so it is possible that they may have met while Henry was in Lord Monson’s service. In 1868 their first child Maud was born. On the baptismal record Henry is described as a confectioner so he must have been between positions as a butler.



Henry Dachicour, at Croome (photograph reproduced by kind permission of Alasdair Mackie)

In the 1871 Census we find that Henry is employed as butler to the Hon. Edward Gore, at his home in Clarendon Square, Leamington. This was a much smaller household with only 4 domestic servants. Martha was still living in Islington but were reunited as a family and when their first son, Sholto, was born in 1877, they were living in Chelsea.

Henry started working for the Earl of Coventry as house steward in about 1880 and it must have been a feather in his cap to have secured this position in such a prestigious household. Initially Martha and the two children remained in Chelsea where, in the 1881

census she described herself as having independent means. In the early 1880s accommodation was found on the Croome estate, which is where their second son, Hugh, was born. The family lived in the house on the old flower gardens.

Sadly, Sholto died when he was only 7. By 1891 Maud had left home and was living at her uncle’s butchers shop in Bath and working as a bookkeeper. By 1901, Hugh was living in Worcester and working as a carriage maker.

Not much can be determined about Henry’s life at Croome Court except that it would have been a very busy one. In 1891 the domestic staff totalled 26. He must have had some time to tend his garden for in 1883 he is reported to have won prizes for his potatoes and parsnips in the Severn Stoke Horticultural Show. One thing which is clear is that Henry continued to reside in the court whilst Martha lived in the old flower gardens house, a factor which ultimately contributed to her death.

Hannah died on 19 September 1906 and the inquest into her death was reported in a number of local newspapers, including a piece in the Gloucestershire Echo just five days later.

‘Woman’s mysterious death’

The death of an old lady named Martha Ann Dachicour (71), wife of the house steward at Croome Court, the country residence of the Earl of Coventry, has been the subject of enquiry by the coroner for the Croome District. The old lady lived alone at Croome, though visited daily by her husband. Last week she was found with her face and body badly bruised. Medical aid was summoned, but the old lady became speechless, and was unable to give any account of the means by which she sustained her injuries. The doctors attributed death to cerebral apoplexy, and found a fracture of the skull and a fractured collarbone, which they thought consistent with a fall. A verdict in accordance with the medical evidence was returned.

Martha was buried in the churchyard at Croome. Unusually, she appeared to have some money of her own and in the Letters of Administration granted to Henry we read that she left effects totalling £184 13s. 2d. – the equivalent of £20,000 today.

Henry continued to work for the 9th Earl, possibly until the outbreak of the Great War. He retired to Bath as both of his surviving children had settled and established families there. He died there in 1919 aged 82.



Earls Croome Court *by Nicholas Kingsley*

The manor of Earls Croome was bought by the Jeffery family in 1547 and remained in their possession until 1691. In the early seventeenth-century they built a new timber-framed manor house which survives today, albeit with much nineteenth-century restoration.

The west-facing main front has a centre with a large gabled dormer and gabled cross-wings, and is decorated with closely set studs and concave-sided lozenges; the five-light windows have ovolo-moulded mullions and transoms. The south side, which has three identical gables with moulded bargeboards, is now rendered and has square hoodmoulds over the windows. The rear elevation, to the east, is of painted brick and has only two outer gables, and the Tudor-looking brick chimneys are all nineteenth-century.



Earls Croome Court from the south west c.1970. After the rendering of the south front but before the demolition of the service wing.

The builder of the house was probably Thomas Jeffery, who inherited the estate in 1629. When Thomas' daughter, Hester Barkham, died in 1691 the manor was sold and throughout the eighteenth-century it was held by members of the Marten family. Martin Marten was succeeded in 1814 by his nephew Thomas Dunne of Gatley (Herefordshire), who, having no need for the manor house as a residence, sold it to the Coventry family as a home for William Coventry, a younger son of the 7th Earl. The nineteenth-century alterations to the house were no doubt made for William Coventry.

After the sale of Croome Court in 1949, Earls Croome Court became the family's main residence on the estate. It remained with the Coventry family until it was sold in 2007. It was subsequently sold again and remains in private ownership.



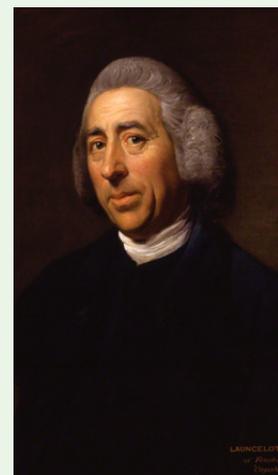
Earls Croome Court: a late 19th-century photograph, before the addition of the porch.

Garden and Park Update *by Katherine Alker*

This year is an especially important one for us as we have two significant milestones to celebrate; the first is that the National Trust has owned the landscape at Croome for 20 years having purchased it in 1996, and the second is that it is the 300th anniversary of Brown's baptism (no-one is exactly sure of his birth date).

We have lots of events to celebrate the tercentenary; from mid-April until the end of October the Embroiderers' Guild will be exhibiting work inspired by Brown's landscape design and the planting at Croome, in the Temple Greenhouse; the theme of one of the short plays by 'Croome Encounters' this year is Brown planning his design at Croome; in July we have

dance performances taking place across the landscape which visitors will be able to enjoy in an event called VISTA; also in July we shall see the 'Art in the Park' installation by artist Kathrin Bohm; and then on 25 September we shall be holding a party to launch the exhibition in Croome Court which will showcase the Nathaniel Dance portrait of Brown on loan from the National Portrait Gallery, the original painting by Richard Wilson of the park and the court in 1758, and other items from the Croome archive. This exhibition runs until 18 December so there is plenty of time for people to see it. We hope you can join in with some of the celebrations we have planned.



Capability Brown by Nathaniel Dance c. 1773 National Portrait Gallery, London



Wall-to-Wall Works of Art!

by Jennie Brown

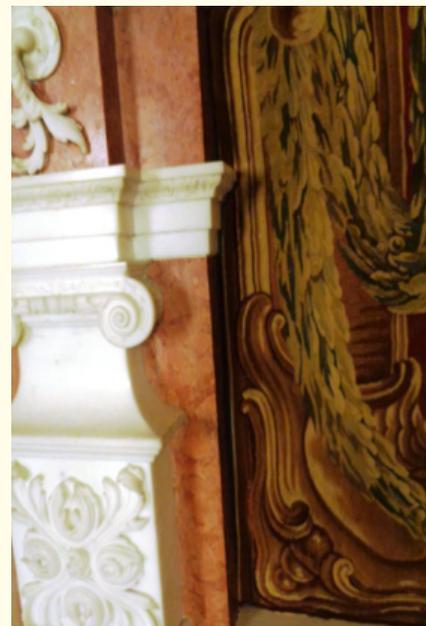
Last December, I revisited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to have a closer look at the Croome Tapestry Room with Dr Elizabeth Cleland (Associate Curator, European Sculpture and Decorative Arts). I am very grateful to Lizzie for giving Croome and me so much support since we first met in 2011 and for her help with this article. Lizzie and I discussed how the tapestries were made and fixed onto the walls.

Weaving The 13 Croome tapestry panels were woven from brand new designs on horizontal looms at the Gobelin Manufactory in Paris between 1764-1771. Each panel was made in one piece.

A team of weavers, probably numbering three or four, sat at a loom prepared with woollen warp threads, the loom's width being equivalent to the planned vertical height of the tapestry. The design (cartoon) painted on paper was temporarily attached underneath the warp threads, oriented with the intended image turned on its side.

Weavers worked facing the back of the tapestry, weaving the weft threads of coloured wool, and silk horizontally under and over the supporting warp threads while following the cartoon and merging their area with that of their neighbour(s). To keep loom widths a feasible size, tapestries were woven with the representation on its side, and then once they were finished and taken off the looms, tapestries were turned through 90 degrees to the correct orientation, and flipped over to show the front.

Weavers changed places – depending on the level of expertise needed for a particular area.



The tapestry alongside the chimneypiece in the Croome Tapestry Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Jennie Brown)

One weaver took 1-2 months to weave one square metre of tapestry.

The north wall tapestry is amazing! It was woven starting at the left vertical side. On reaching the area where the chimneypiece intrudes, the weaving fits the actual contours exactly around both sides of the chimneypiece.

Only a speck of wall is visible. Warp threads not being used would be taken 'off loom' until needed again. On completion the unwoven threads were secured. Lizzie said it was usual for large tapestries to have a backing attached.

At Croome Three men (Jones, Elwood and Bolton) installed the tapestries in 1771. When the left vertical edge was firmly fixed, the roll of tapestry would be slowly unwound along the wall and the backing nailed in various places to support the weight and keep the whole tapestry taut.

The whole room, between dado and cornice, was covered with tapestry. Tapestry panel edges were woven brown to imitate a picture frame.

Damage Lizzie pointed out that the thin panel above the pier mirror has its woven top border but the damask design is painted directly onto the wall. There is also damage near the south west door.

Sale The 9th Earl sold the tapestry in March 1900. This was a good time to sell as agents were looking for suitable ones to buy. In 1949, the remaining room (plus pier table and mirror) was also sold. From November 1958, the complete room has been open to visitors in New York.

The British Section at Museum is to be updated. It will close for about 18 months. I will pass on any information from Lizzie about the actual dates, or visit www.metmuseum.org

C.J. Coventry: Katia and beyond **by Susanne Atkin**

On Easter Day 23 April 1916, 9 officers and 87 men of the Worcestershire Yeomanry were killed during the 'affair at Qatiya' [Katia] and at Oghratina; 15 more died of wounds, and 235 officers and men were captured by the Turks and imprisoned; the officers, including C.J. Coventry, were taken to a prison camp at Yozgad (pronounced use-guard) in Turkey.

Charles John Coventry (1867-1929) was the second son of the 9th Earl and Blanche. In photographs he is recognisable as a tall, moustached figure, often in uniform as in the images taken during family celebrations of the Golden Wedding of the Earl and Countess.

dead; after being released by the Boers, he received a 5-month prison sentence in the UK for complicity in the raid, although the Home Secretary released him after 24 days due to ill health. The adventuring did not stop: he was back in Africa between 1898 and 1899 with the West Africa Frontier Police in Nigeria. Charles married American-born Louise (Lily) Bruen Whitehouse in January 1900, and they resided at Earls Croome Court. In May 1900 he transferred to the Worcestershire Yeomanry (the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars), retiring in 1925.



Family group taken on the south steps of Croome Court in 1915; Charles is standing 3rd from the left.

Known as a cricketer, a racehorse trainer, and Jockey Club starter, Charles served in the military for most of his life: his gravestone records 'Served with His Majesty's Forces 1885-1929'. In 1885 he was gazetted lieutenant in the Militia Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment (a part-time force, not the regular army), and was seconded to the Bechuanaland Border Police (1888-96) during which time he played cricket in the first test matches in South Africa (1888-9), and took part in the Matabele Campaign (1893) for which he was mentioned in despatches. But, during the ill-fated Jameson Raid (1896) he was wounded, then listed as

When Charles embarked with the Yeomanry on the horse transport ship Eloby from Avonmouth for Alexandria (Egypt) on 9 April 1915 he took with him his horses and his groom from Earls Croome Court stables, Harry Matty, aged about 22. The Yeomanry left their horses at Chatby Camp (Egypt) in the charge of Major Coventry to fight as infantry at Gallipoli; Coventry arrived there to take command of the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars on 28 August. Leaving Gallipoli in November, the Yeomanry became part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, patrolling the desert guarding the railway lines.



Charles Coventry saluting his father on receiving his medal during Worcester's Victory March, August 1919. Imprisonment in Turkey appears to have aged him.

On Easter Day, 23 April 1916, the Worcestershire Yeomanry and the Gloucestershire Hussars were outnumbered at Katia, an oasis little more than a speck on the map but the scene of a disaster for the British; when the Gloucestershires raised the white flag, Coventry was also forced to surrender. Both Coventry and Matty were listed as missing, until later confirmed as prisoners of war; Matty was taken to a hospital in Damascus but lost his leg, and was not repatriated until February 1918 when he was admitted to a hospital in London.

Three months after leaving Katia the surviving officers reached Yozgad prison camp in Turkey. There, they formed a Ski Club, and the Yozgad Vale Hunt (the men promised not to escape while hunting); séances and a ouijah board were however used as cover for attempted escapes. On 15 April 1917 Col. Coventry gave an 'awfully interesting' lecture on the Jameson Raid. In August 1918 he documented his health problems after contracting typhus in November 1916 from which he nearly died, and its after-effects of weakness of his eyes, a weak right leg, and bad headaches; he also tried to describe the disappointment of not being exchanged on several occasions.

Coventry was repatriated in October 1918 and arrived back in the UK on 7 December 1918. The following day he wrote his statement about what had happened at Katia; in April 1919 he was informed 'that no blame attaches to him'. It will soon be 100 years since the disastrous skirmish at Katia. The campaign in the Middle East does not seem to have the same prominence in the history of the Great War as the trench warfare on the Western Front, but its repercussions are still being felt today.

At a luncheon in Worcester in January 1919, Charles talked about his imprisonment, saying he would like the audience to understand 'that no matter how long a man had been a prisoner a month seemed like a year and a year like a decade'. The officers' troubles had chiefly been mental, but what had hurt them more than anything was that they had not been allowed to communicate in any way with their men who had suffered everything of the 'most brutal nature' from their captors.

For the next couple of years Charles campaigned to prevent the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars being turned into an armoured car regiment, telling one audience 'They wanted their horses, which they loved.' However, in 1922 Coventry was asked to reform the Worcestershire Yeomanry and it became part of the 100th (Worcestershire and Oxfordshire Yeomanry) Field Brigade Royal Field Artillery, with horses replaced by tractors; he became its honorary colonel in 1927.

Charles died at Earls Croome Court in 1929, age 62. C.J. Coventry was variously referred to as popular and genial, but the most striking description of him was made by a fellow officer (in *The Road to Yozgad*): 'I never met anyone man or officer who didn't worship Charles Coventry. Very quick tempered, he could be as fierce as anyone I ever saw or heard but no one could help loving him and he was a charming man to work under.'

Research about Charles Coventry, of which this is a brief extract, forms part of *Croome 100: the Croome Estate during the Great War*, an independent research project by Susanne Atkin, to be published during 2017.



Grave of CJ Coventry, Earls Croome churchyard (Susanne Atkin)



THIS ARTICLE IS NOT FOR THOSE WHO ARE SCEPTICAL ABOUT STRANGE HAPPENINGS!

The Green Stone

by Eileen Clement

It was six years after the Oral History Project started when I interviewed a Hare Krishna devotee and first heard about the Green Stone (or Meonia Stone). In the late 1970s/early 1980s UFOs were seen and psychic messages received across the country, so like-minded people formed Parasearch in Wolverhampton.

To cut a very long story short, a search was to be made for the Green Stone, dating back to Pharaoh Akhenaten 3000 years ago, the Knights Templar in the 13th century and the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. Messages led the group via Huddington Court and Harvington Hall to look for a sword at Knights Hill. This was found and led them via a swan at Dunstall Castle to Swan's Neck on the River Avon to the Green Stone. During the search members suffered psychic attacks, experiencing loud crashes and strange smells in their homes, etc. The Green Stone was to be used to destroy the Evil One, which they did in February 1982. A book was written by Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman.

I immediately obtained a copy of *The Green Stone*, which I found interesting, exciting and fascinating. I lent it to a few people, including Michael Forster-Smith, some of whom enjoyed it and others were sceptical. I then forgot about the Green Stone when last October Rachel Sharpe mentioned the book, so I offered to lend her my copy. The following Wednesday I took it to Rachel in the office and went into the Park to do my Garden Stewarding. On the Chinese Bridge I met two visitors who had not been to Croome since the 1970s and they mentioned the Green Stone. They were involved in subsequent activities in 1982, which resulted in a further book called 'The Eye of Fire'. We all decided that this was fate bringing us together.

Michael and I had previously talked about leading a Friends walk to Knights Hill, but had not got round to it. Sheila and David Bavington were keen to share their experiences and we swapped email addresses. I told Michael and Rachel of this strange coincidence and we agreed this was an opportunity not to be missed. Sheila and David visited Croome again to meet Michael and Rachel and David offered to lead the walk, which we hope to organise later this year.



A tree for Capability and a Cedar for Posterity

by Sue Coleman

Tuesday 2 February 2016, a cold bright winter's morning at Croome. The volunteer garden team was busy pruning privet and lowering laurel. And along came Dame Helen Ghosh, Director General of the National Trust, brandishing a new spade. Now that wasn't something that happened every day so we downed tools and joined the procession of people making their way along the Wild Walk, out onto Church Hill and down to a little group of people clustered round a Land Rover in the middle of the field. As we got closer we could see a small hole had been dug and beside it was a plant in a pot.

This year, as it is 300 years since the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, events are taking place throughout the country to celebrate his creativity and vision. Dame Helen was visiting properties to plant some of the first of many trees to mark this special anniversary. She told us that she first feasted her eyes on the 'heavenly landscape' of Croome in 1986 and was delighted to be performing today's very special tree planting.



Dame Helen Ghosh and Katherine Alker planting the cedar of Lebanon (Sue Coleman)

And so to the other star of the show, a small (but beautifully formed) Cedar of Lebanon, grown from seed and brought here from its native home. For Croome, the siting of the tree is historically accurate and appropriate but also attending the planting was Martin Gardner from the International Conifer Conservation Programme and for him this particular tree had another significance. The organisation was established in 1991 and aside from vital research, its wider remit is the conservation of plant biodiversity in the face of global environmental change.

Many conifers which have featured in our landscape for centuries – the giant Redwood, the Monkey Puzzle, Atlas Cedar, Monterey Pine – are in danger of extinction. Tree conservation and re-planting is

vital. Even in the field of modern medicine, 25% of our medicines are derived from tropical forest plants and there is potential for many more.

Cedrus Libani, family Pinaceae, is one of 211 endangered conifer species (out of a total of 615). Croome has become part of a network of 145 sites growing a total of 13,000 trees in a massive biodiversity project. Many of the sites are on private land, some in public gardens, golf courses, even a monastery. The progress of Croome's cedar of Lebanon will be monitored within the Conifer Conservation Programme.

Approaching 300 years after the initial vision of the 6th Earl of Coventry and 'Capability' Brown, it is fulfilling and exciting to know that an overgrown estate rescued from obscurity by the National Trust in 1996, maintains such a vital role in conservation on a global scale. Our mixed hedges provide shelter for all forms of wildlife. Croome's carefully managed park encourages many diverse species. Every plant that survives and flourishes here is part of our heritage and our legacy.

We hope that the cedar, appropriately a symbol of strength, will flourish. Slow and steady is its maxim – about a foot a year if we're lucky – but if it's comfortable at Croome it could live for 300 years or more (in its native Lebanon one specimen was found to be over 1,000 years old).

As a native of the mountains adjacent to the north-east Mediterranean coast of Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, a place of great temperature contrasts and surprisingly harsh winters, it must adapt to our changing climate but, all in all, it stands a good chance of a long life at Croome and a starring role in the 'quadricentenary' of 2116.



Dame Helen Ghosh with Michael Forster-Smith, Katherine Alker, Jill Tovey and Peter Beresford; John Henderson and John Chugg are at the rear. (Sue Coleman)

RAF Defford Museum and the Defford Airfield Heritage Group. The story continues - The Cold War years

by Bob Shaw

The restored Ambulance Garage opened to visitors on Saturday 13 February. It is the RAF Defford Museum's second building and is to be dedicated to telling the story of The Cold War Years at Defford. Dr Dennis Williams, the Museum Curator, commented: "So far, interest has tended to focus more on the war-winning achievements of Defford, 1942-1945. Now we want to give more prominence to the contribution Defford made to the Cold War which followed, in the years 1946-1957."



(Robin Hector)

But for the time being in the magnificently restored former Ambulance Garage, it will be a case of 'Work in Progress'. Already in place however, and in accordance with the theme of the Cold War Years, the story of Pershore and the move from Defford in 1957, is presented to visitors.

The main attraction is the Canberra forward fuselage in the form when it was used after its flying life ended, as a Ground Emergency Procedures Trainer at Pershore. At least part of this aircraft flew at Defford – one of the three ejection seats was previously fitted to a Canberra which was flown on trials at Defford and Pershore. At the moment it lacks the control console which stood alongside this Canberra nose section when used as an Emergencies Procedures Trainer. It is planned to recreate this console to form a unique working exhibit. For the moment however we have a view of the illuminated interior and the evocative sound effects of a Canberra start up.

The Canberra nose is on loan from the RAF Museum at Cosford, and their rules demand that visitors are not allowed to contact the exhibit nor enter it. But Dennis Williams has completed a 'virtual tour' of the interior of the Canberra on a big screen to turn this into a fascinating exhibit.

Canberra aircraft were the 'Work Horses' of post-war Defford, being involved in a great variety of trials, when they featured a wide assortment of aerials, radomes, lumps and bumps (we hope to show a couple of preserved radomes which had been fitted to Canberra aircraft for trials).

The building which contained the Ambulance Garage also housed the Mortuary of the RAF Defford Station Sick Quarters. The Mortuary is now the Museum store and will not be open to visitors.

A new exhibition in the RAF Defford Museum, "Women of RAF Defford" opened on 22 January. By 1945, there were well over 2,500 people at RAF Defford and of these, up to 600 were women. They played an essential role in the fight to stay ahead of the enemy in the battle of the air waves, often in dangerous and demanding circumstances.

The women included WAAFs, Wrens (who as expert radar operators flew as aircrew in Fleet Air Arm aircraft based at Defford), distinguished women scientists who flew on radar trials, technicians and other women civilians in essential roles. After the War what had been achieved by these women tended to be forgotten.



Former Petty Officer Wendy Hogarth inspects the uniform she wore when serving at Defford in 1945. (Graham Cartwright)

In a small ceremony to open the exhibition, and to commemorate just one of the women who served at Defford, Mrs Pamela Walker unveiled a mounted photograph of her late sister Mrs Doreen Boller (formerly WAAF Wilson) in what is now the National Trust 'RAF Canteen'. Doreen was posted to RAF Defford in 1943 to become the Secretary to the Senior Medical Officer based in the building which now houses the National Trust visitor centre. During her time there, she had a bicycle accident and cut her face and leg, and needed to be admitted to hospital. As a servicewoman she would normally have been sent to the RAF hospital in Evesham, but the Senior Medical Officer is said to have insisted she remain at RAF Defford, in the Station Sick Quarters where she could be available to take shorthand. She was given a screened-off bed in the Airmen's Ward – the room which is now the National Trust restaurant and where her picture now proudly hangs.

The exhibition itself consists of eight large display boards in the Museum, plus changes in the costume case which now displays the uniforms of Wren Petty Officer Wendy Hogarth and her husband Flt Lt George Hogarth who she married while serving at Defford in 1944. The Museum and Exhibition are open daily between 11.00am and 4.30pm. The exhibition will continue indefinitely.



(Robin Hector)





The Croome Walled Gardens Reveal New Garden Design to Visitors

by Victoria Cronin



Daffodils in bloom at the Walled Gardens



Fruit trees being planted at the Walled Gardens

After welcoming more than 3,000 visitors across 10 weekends in 2015, the Walled Gardens will be open every weekend this summer, starting at Easter. A total of 1km, 2.5m wide, steel edged paths which divide the Gardens into zones were due to be laid by the end of October. Most of the work was completed within the deadline, until the extremely wet weather over the winter months delayed the final stretch. The new path layout will now be finished in time for the Easter opening. 5,500 tulip and daffodil bulbs were planted over the autumn as part of the new garden design. A spectacular display of yellow is on view as the daffodils poke their way through the new soil on the re-sculptured bank.

140 fruit trees are also being planted 'espalier' style along the primary paths. The avenues will portray the history of apples and pears with a mixture of heritage and modern varieties from Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.

In recognition of the vision and commitment of Croome and the Walled Gardens, both have recently been short-listed for the BBC Countryfile Magazine 'Garden of the Year' Award, the What's On Readers' 'Best Regional Visitor Attraction' Award in Worcestershire and jointly went on to win the 'Restoration of a Georgian Garden or Landscape' Award at the Georgian Group Architectural Awards 2015.

The Walled Gardens will be open Friday to Sunday (plus bank holidays) every week between 25 March and 30 October 2016. Opening times are 11am-5pm, with last admissions at 4pm. Tickets cost £5 per adult and children are free. For more information visit www.croomewalledgardens.com



Chris Cronin and Michael Forster-Smith, winners at the Georgian Group Architectural Awards 2015

